

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose of the INRMP

This Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan guides implementation of the natural resources program on Marine Corps Air Station Miramar from 2006 through 2010. This INRMP shows interrelationships between individual components of natural resources management (e.g., soils, vegetation, wetlands, wildlife), mission requirements, and other land-use activities affecting MCAS Miramar natural resources. The INRMP integrates current and future land use activities at MCAS Miramar with natural resources management and conservation. As such, this INRMP carries forward the multi-species conservation planning commitments from BRAC realignment actions. The natural resources program described within this INRMP conserves and rehabilitates MCAS Miramar land and natural resources and helps ensure compliance with environmental laws and regulations.

The INRMP summarizes baseline information, which can be used to help ensure compliance with regulatory and planning processes, such as those required by the Sikes Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, and Clean Water Act. This INRMP fulfills other responsibilities with regard to Department of Defense (DoD) and Marine Corps policies and legal requirements regarding natural resource planning (summarized in Chapter 6 and Appendix A). This INRMP continues to provide the benefits that were provided by MCAS Miramar INRMP 2000 to species, which led the USFWS to decline to designate critical habitat aboard MCAS Miramar, per section 318 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2004. A more detailed discussion of relationships among the MCAS Miramar INRMP 2000, this INRMP, and critical habitat designation decisions is in Section 7.4.1.1, *Critical Habitat Considerations*.

The INRMP is intended to be a technical document used by persons planning and/or preparing Station approvals, management actions, orders, instructions, guidelines, standard operating procedures, and other plans. Information from previously produced natural resource management plans prepared for the Station (e.g., Fish and Wildlife Management Plan (USFWS 1993a), Outdoor Recreation Management Plan (NAS Miramar 1991), Vernal Pool Management Plan (Bauder and Wier 1991)) has been incorporated into this INRMP if it is still applicable to the management of MCAS Miramar. The INRMP provides technical guidance for the integration of natural resource issues and concerns for facilities and operational planning, in accordance with the NEPA decision-making processes.

This INRMP is not intended to be used by persons operating in the field, other than the Natural Resources Division, Environmental Management Department. Field personnel are expected to be operating under Station guidelines, plans, orders, or other approvals that have been developed using the INRMP and have already had environmental compliance review and, where applicable, regulatory approvals and/or permitting.

### 1.1.1 Requirement for Preparation of an INRMP

The Sikes Act states, *The Secretary of Defense shall carry out a program to provide for the conservation and rehabilitation of natural resources on military installations. To facilitate the program, the Secretary of each military department shall prepare and implement an integrated natural resources management plan for each military installation ...*

The Sikes Act (16 USC 670 *et seq.*) requires that, consistent with the use of military installations to ensure the preparedness of the Armed Forces, each INRMP shall, where appropriate and applicable, provide for:

- fish and wildlife management, land management, forest management, and fish and wildlife-oriented recreation;
- fish and wildlife habitat enhancement or modifications;
- wetland protection, enhancement, and restoration where necessary for support of fish or wildlife;
- integration of, and consistency among, the various activities conducted under the INRMP;
- establishment of specific natural resources management objectives and time frames for proposed action;
- sustained use by the public of natural resources to the extent such use is not inconsistent with the needs of fish and wildlife resources management;
- public access to the military installation that is necessary or appropriate for sustained use by the public of natural resources to the extent that the use is not inconsistent with the needs of fish and wildlife resources, subject to requirements necessary to ensure safety and military security;
- enforcement of natural resource laws and regulations;
- no net loss in the capability of military installation lands to support the military mission of the installation; and
- such other activities as the Secretary of the military department considers appropriate.

The Sikes Act also requires or provides for:

- regular review of this INRMP and its effects, not less often than every five years;
- provisions for spending hunting and fishing permit fees exclusively for the protection, conservation, and management of fish and wildlife, including habitat improvement and related activities in accordance with the INRMP;
- exemption from procurement of services under Office of Management and Budget Circular A-76 and any of its successor circulars; and
- priority for contracts involving implementation of this INRMP to state and federal agencies having responsibility for conservation of fish or wildlife.

An installation must prepare an INRMP when it supports federally listed species and/or designated critical habitat; substantial wetland areas; or large areas (e.g., 50 or more acres) used for military readiness purposes, which require care (e.g., actions to prevent soil erosion) (MCO P5090.2\_). MCAS Miramar, having met all three requirements, is required to prepare and implement an INRMP.

The previous INRMP (MCAS Miramar INRMP 2000) implemented requirements of Biological Opinion 1-6-95-F-33 (USFWS 1996a) and Section 404 Permit number 95-20158-ES for the Realignment of Naval Air Station (NAS) Miramar to the MCAS Miramar. This compliance required MCAS Miramar to ... *develop and implement their proposed Multiple Species Habitat Management Plan (MHMP) in a manner that is consistent with the guidelines that have been established for subarea plans for the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP).*

During the past five years the natural resources program at MCAS Miramar has significantly improved due to updated and more extensive survey data for Special Status Species, vernal pool habitat, and other resources; improved geospatial data management capabilities; staff development and experience; and lessons learned from projects accomplished or ongoing. This INRMP is a major revision of the 2000 INRMP (MCAS Miramar INRMP 2000). This revision is being accomplished using the *Handbook for Preparing, Revising and Implementing Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans on Marine Corps Installations* (USMC 2004).

Revision of this INRMP, as required by the Sikes Act, has been accomplished in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). This cooperation

ensured that the INRMP reflected mutual agreement of these parties concerning conservation, protection, and management of fish and wildlife resources on the Station. Appendix F includes review/concurrence documents from the USFWS and CDFG. Also, as required by the Sikes Act, this INRMP reflects comments received by the Station following public review.

In early 2006 the DoD, USFWS, and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a Cooperative Integrated Natural Resource Management Program on Military Installations. The DoD, among other items, agreed to:

- take the lead in the development of policies related to INRMP development and implementation and invite USFWS and state fish and wildlife agency offices to participate in developing and updating INRMPs, well in advance of final product date;
- encourage military installation to take advantage of these agencies' natural resources expertise through the use of Economy Act transfers and Sikes Act cooperative agreements;
- encourage military installations to identify INRMP projects and give priority to those that ensure conservation of natural resources while sustaining military mission activities, achieve compliance with laws, and provide adequate staffing for development and implementation of INRMPs;
- subject to mission, safety, and security requirements, provide access to military installations to facilitate the sustainable multipurpose use of its natural resources;
- identify DoD natural resources research needs and develop research proposals with input from the agencies; and
- encourage Military Services to establish natural resources management liaisons with the agencies to facilitate INRMP coordination, cooperative regional and local natural resources partnerships, and natural resources conservation technology transfer and training initiatives.

The MCAS Miramar INRMP was developed and will be implemented in a manner consistent with this Memorandum of Understanding.

Endangered Species Act compliance review of the INRMP was via informal consultation as implementation is not likely to adversely affect any listed threatened or endangered species. Any future action warranting formal Section 7 ESA consultation would result in a biological opinion that would complement provisions within this INRMP and would have precedence.

### **1.1.2 INRMP Implementation**

MCAS Miramar's natural resource management program will seek appropriate funding and will set priorities based on funding actually received and annual reviews. Implementation of planned actions is a requirement of the Sikes Act, which directs the development and implementation of INRMPs.

This INRMP will be considered to be implemented when MCAS Miramar (USMC 2004):

- actively requests, receives, and uses funds for "must fund" projects and activities;
- ensures that sufficient numbers of professionally trained natural resources management staff are available to perform the tasks required by the INRMP;
- coordinates annually with the USFWS and CDFG; and
- documents specific INRMP action accomplishments undertaken each year.

### **1.1.3 Reviews, Approvals, and Revisions**

Drafts and revisions of this INRMP and the companion EA assessing implementation were reviewed and approved by MCAS Miramar Environmental Impact Review Board, as described in the Station Order for the Environmental Impact Review Board.

This INRMP will be reviewed annually with the cooperation of the USFWS and CDFG. Annual reviews will verify that (USMC 2004):

- current information on all conservation programs is available;
- all “must fund” projects and activities have been budgeted for and implementation is on schedule;
- all required professionally trained natural resources positions are filled or are in the process of being filled;
- projects and activities for the upcoming year have been identified and included in the INRMP (does not necessitate revising the INRMP);
- all required coordination with the federal, state, and installation stakeholders has occurred; and
- all significant changes to the installation’s mission requirements or its natural resources have been identified.

This INRMP will be reviewed and/or re-approved at least every five years. The next revision is planned to begin in 2010 for implementation in 2011.

### **1.1.4 Relationship to Regional Conservation Planning Efforts**

Previous natural resources stewardship by the Department of the Navy resulted in valuable biological resources remaining on MCAS Miramar. These resources include important habitats for many rare and sensitive species of plants and wildlife, as well as regional habitat linkages and wildlife corridors. Unfortunately, important biological resources (*e.g.*, vernal pool habitat, coastal California gnatcatcher [*Polioptila californica californica*] habitat, wildlife corridors) have not fared as well on civilian holdings throughout the southern California coastal region. Many species and their associated habitats are declining due to greatly increased civilian development. Habitats that remain in the region are becoming increasingly fragmented. As a result, the city, county, state, and federal governments, as well as the general public, have given greater attention to the biological resources on MCAS Miramar in the context of regional conservation planning.

Southwestern San Diego County is a focal point for regional planning efforts to ensure the continued survival of sensitive plant and wildlife species and representations of their associated habitats. These efforts have been facilitated by the Natural Community Conservation Planning Act of 1991 passed by the State of California. The Natural Community Conservation Planning Act process was developed to encourage the conservation of natural communities before species within those communities are threatened with extinction. Natural Community Conservation Planning Act program goals are to provide long-term protection for natural communities on a regional basis while allowing continued urban development and growth. It is designed to be a voluntary, collaborative effort, primarily involving landowners, local government, and state and federal agencies.

Three subregional plans have been developed in San Diego County under the Natural Community Conservation Planning Act program umbrella. MCAS Miramar, along with several other jurisdictions, is within the MSCP subregion of the southwestern portion of the county. The Department of Navy supports the Natural Community Conservation Planning Act program’s aims and efforts (Williams 1992). However, the conservation of sensitive biological resources at MCAS Miramar is being planned separately out of concern that the creation of preserves on MCAS Miramar, as part of the MSCP, arbitrarily prohibits military activities.

The Marine Corps believes that military activities generally can be compatible with the conservation of sensitive biological resources<sup>1</sup>. In considering participation in regional ecosystem approaches to resolving land use conflicts, the Marine Corps considered the following principles:

1. The overriding mission of the DoD is the protection of the national security of the United States, and military activities on departmental lands are vital to fulfillment of that mission.
2. Such agreements, and their projects, will not detract from the DoD national mission, now or in the future.
3. Military lands cannot be used for the mitigation of impacts of non-department actions occurring off the installation that affect the environment.
4. Military lands cannot be set aside as perpetual environmental preserves. While conservation is, and shall be, practiced on Marine Corps installations, the Marine Corps maintains the flexibility to adapt the defense mission to political and technological developments.
5. The DoD's first priority shall be to integrate the management of natural and cultural resources with the military mission within the ecosystem supporting the installation.

## 1.2 Military Mission

### MCAS Miramar Mission

*To exercise command of assigned aeronautical shore activities providing support to aviation units of the Fleet Marine Forces and other geographical areas of the continental United States to ensure that all services and facilities will be adequately planned and provided for.*

The Station is managed under the purview of the Commanding Officer, MCAS Miramar. The Third Marine Air Wing is the Station's primary tenant.



### Third Marine Air Wing Mission

*Provide combat-ready, expeditionary aviation forces capable of short-notice, world-wide deployment to Marine Air Ground Task Force, fleet, and unified commanders.*

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<sup>1</sup> 22 June 1995. Letter from J.A. Brabham, Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps, Deputy Chief of Staff for Installation and Logistics, to Mr. Gail Kobetich, Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### 1.3 Management Approach

Ecosystem management is the basis for the management of natural resources on land under Marine Corps' jurisdiction. An ecosystem can be defined as a dynamic, natural complex of living organisms interacting with each other and with their associated nonliving environment. Ecosystem management has been defined in various ways (*e.g.*, Leslie *et al.* 1996); however, all encompass a similar approach to management. As this approach is employed by the Marine Corps, the following definition from Marine Corps Environment Compliance and Protection Manual (MCO P5090.2\_) is applicable:

A goal-driven approach to managing natural and cultural resources that supports present and future mission requirements; preserves ecosystem integrity; is at a scale compatible with natural processes; is cognizant of natural processes' time scales; recognizes social and economic viability within functioning ecosystems; is adaptable to complex, changing requirements; and is realized through effective partnerships among private, local, state, tribal, and federal interests. Ecosystem management is a process that considers the environment as a complex system functioning as a whole, not as a collection of parts; and recognizes that people and their social and economic needs are a part of the whole.

The MCAS Miramar overall strategy for conservation and management is to:

- (1) limit activities, minimize development, and perform mitigation actions in areas supporting high densities of vernal pool habitat, threatened or endangered species, and other wetlands; and
- (2) manage activities and development in areas of low densities, or no regulated resources, with site-specific measures and programmatic instructions (Chapter 5).

This strategy enables MCAS Miramar to meet its goals and objectives relative to natural resources management and conservation, both locally on the Station and within the region. A Habitat Evaluation Model (HEM) was developed to identify ecologically important areas on the Station, which were, in turn, considered when delineating Management Areas on MCAS Miramar (Chapter 5).

Success of this INRMP will be measured by the implementation “must fund” projects, which, in turn, implement INRMP goals and objectives (chapters 7 and 9). This will help ensure that the Station meets requirements of the Sikes Act. Those implementing this INRMP also need to ensure that there is no net loss in the capability of MCAS Miramar lands to fulfill the military operational requirements, as also required by the Sikes Act. The DoD and MCAS Miramar, in particular, recognize that degradation of the land degrades its use for realistic training, thereby degrading readiness.

Goals, such as those for natural resources management, are general expressions of desired future conditions that represent the long-range aim of management. Marine Corps natural resources management goals, as established in MCO P5090.2\_, are as follows:

- preserve access to air, land, and sea spaces to meet military readiness requirements;
- comply with applicable laws governing the protection of natural resources;
- provide for public enjoyment of lands under the control of the Marine Corps, provided such access does not conflict with military readiness requirements and does not harm sensitive natural resources managed by the Marine Corps; and
- participate in regional ecosystem partnerships, provided such participation does not conflict with military readiness requirements and does not harm sensitive natural resources managed by the Marine Corps.

Natural resource management goals specifically adopted by MCAS Miramar are as follows:

- support the Marine Corps' military mission by ensuring compliance with applicable environmental laws and regulations;
- ensure no net loss in the capability of military installation lands to support the military mission;
- include natural resource management as a component of planning for execution of Marine Corps operational requirements;
- identify and select opportunities for maintaining biodiversity, including conservation of important plants and animals; and
- secure regulatory agency and public recognition of Marine Corps environmental stewardship efforts.